

TOWN OF MANSFIELD
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
MAY 13, 2014
MANSFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

Town Clerk Mary Stanton called the Annual Town Meeting for Budget Consideration to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Mansfield Middle School Auditorium. The Town Clerk read the Notice and Warning of the Meeting and explained the eligibility requirements for voting. She then requested nominations for Moderator.

Antonia Moran nominated Bruce Clouette to serve as Moderator. Hearing no other nominations the nominations were closed. Motion to approve Mr. Clouette as Moderator passed unanimously.

Without objection Town Clerk Mary Stanton was appointed secretary to the meeting and Town Attorney Dennis O'Brien was appointed as the parliamentarian. A request to stipulate the adoption of Roberts Rules of Order was approved without objection. Mr. Clouette outlined the procedures for those wishing to speak and requested citizens limit their comments to five minutes, which was also approved without objection.

Mr. Clouette recognized Mayor Elizabeth Paterson who outlined the four objectives of the budget, which are to maintain current services and programs, promote key Council policy goal and initiatives, continue to build Fund Balance, and increase the General Fund contribution to the Capital Fund. The Mayor thanked the Town and District staff as well as elected officials for their work.

Mr. Clouette introduced the Chair of the Council's Finance Committee Bill Ryan and Mansfield Board of Education's Chair Mark LaPlaca to present a more detailed explanation of the budget.

Councilor Ryan reviewed the General Fund Budget including the general government expenditure trends and cost drivers and the projected revenues. Mr. Ryan presented information on the positive revenue impact of the Storrs Center project.

Board of Education Chair Mark LaPlaca spoke to the budgets for the prior five years and the proposed 1.74% increase for the FY 2014/2015 budget, including expenditure trends. Mr. LaPlaca introduced those members of the Board of Education who were present.

Mr. Ryan reviewed highlights of the Capital Fund and the Capital Non-Recurring Fund. In summary, Mr. Ryan noted the tax impact on the median single family residence would be no increase for FY 2014/2015.

Mr. Ryan offered the following resolutions for consideration:

RESOLVED: That the proposed General Fund Budget for the Town of Mansfield for fiscal year July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 in the amount of \$36,643,304 which proposed budget was adopted by the Council on April 28, 2014, be adopted and that the sums estimated and set forth in said budget be appropriated for the purpose indicated.

RESOLVED: That in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-51, the proportionate share for the Town of Mansfield of the annual budget for Regional School District No. 19 shall be added to the General Fund Budget appropriation for the Town of Mansfield for fiscal year July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 and said sums shall be paid by the Town to the Regional School District as they become available.

RESOLVED: That the proposed Capital Projects Budget for fiscal year July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 in the amount of \$ 6,599,020 be adopted provided that the portion proposed to be funded by bonds or notes shall, at the appropriate times, be introduced for action by the Town Council subject to a vote by referendum as required by Section 407 of the Town Charter.

RESOLVED: That the proposed Capital and Non-Recurring Reserve Fund Budget for fiscal year July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 in the amount of \$ 2,044,600 be adopted.

The motion was seconded.

Moderator Bruce Clouette outlined the process for proposing amendments to the proposed budget and the voting process. Mr. Clouette asked for comments on the budget.

Peggy Beckett Rinker, Hillside Circle, thanked the Council and Board for their hard work and moved to increase the Board of Education budget by \$126,430.

The motion was seconded.

Martin Sommer, Warrenville Road, stated education is the most important service the Town provides and offered a friendly amendment to increase the Board of Education budget to a total of \$145,000 to be used for supplies and technology.

Ms. Beckett Rinker agreed to accept the friendly amendment, noting her intention was to restore the funds that were cut from the budget.

Cynara Stities, Sycamore Drive, spoke in favor of the amendment as the additional funds would not necessarily lead to a tax increase.

Brian Coleman, Centre Street, questioned whether the increase would need to be retained in future budgets.

Mark LaPlaca explained that, while he was in favor of restoring the funds, he could not offer any guarantees as to how the Board would decide to use the additional funds.

April Holinko, Middle Turnpike, clarified Mr. Coleman's comment noting the Minimum Budget Requirement is still in place meaning any increase would be in the budgets going forward.

The motion, as amended, passed in a voice vote.

Paul Shapiro, Davis Road, Town Councilor and Deputy Mayor, speaking as a resident moved to increase other financing uses – Capital Fund program – in the General Fund budget by \$50,000 and therefore the Public Works budget in the Capital Fund budget with the intent of increasing funding for the transportation/walkway account.

The motion was seconded and passed on a voice vote.

Raluca Mocanu, Maple Road, suggested the Town should provide benchmarks against comparable entities in order to better evaluate programs.

Town Manager Matt Hart stated the Town has a set of performance measurements with which we compare ourselves to other municipalities within the consortium. The Town Council also reviews the mill rate and expenditures of comparable area towns.

Cynara Stites, Sycamore Drive, questioned the police services budget.

Town Manager Matt Hart explained the budget line shows an increase due to the state mandated increase in benefits.

Lyle Scruggs, Thomas Drive, expressed his belief that recent cuts to the Education budgets are unacceptable and moved to increase the Board of Education budget by \$250,000 to be used to pay for unfunded mandates and past cuts to special education.

The motion was seconded.

Mr. Clouette cautioned that motions indicating how money would be spent are only recommendations.

Jeannette Picard, Timber Drive, commented Mansfield is a wonderful Town which provides a great education, a priority for our Town. She believes money spent on education helps the mill rate.

David Freudman, Eastwood Road, stated that an increase in education funding presupposes we are currently underspending, when in fact the Town is actually spending more than many comparable area towns.

Martin Sommer, Warrenville road, asked how much is spent per pupil, per year.

Mark LaPlaca stated the proposed per pupil expenditure is about \$17,000 per year.

Paul Shapiro, Davis Road resident, Town Councilor and Deputy Mayor questioned if cuts in the Special Education program violated any state and federal mandates.

Mark LaPlaca stated the Town has not denied services to any student.

Superintendent Fred Baruzzi stated \$135,000 was removed from the Special Education Reserve Fund as a way to keep the budget low.

Mr. Shapiro reminded those present that last year's referendum was defeated not because of an increase in the number of "no" votes but because of a decrease in the number of "yes" votes and urged residents to get people to the polls if there is a referendum.

Raluca Mocanu, Maple Road, questioned why the per pupil cost is increasing if enrollment is decreasing.

Richard Woodworth, Woods Road, stated the increase in taxes has made it difficult for some to remain in Mansfield.

Michele Pereira-Lopes, Browns Road, supports the amendment to increase the education budget and suggested that the increase be offset by decreasing other expenditures.

Lee Terry, Dunham Pond Road, spoke in opposition to the amendment as there are adequate funds put aside for education.

Dennis Roberts, Chaffeeville Road, remarked the education budget has been increased by \$150,000 already this evening and this amendment would add an additional \$250,000 which would increase Minimum Budget Requirement substantially.

Martin Sommer, Warrenville Road, understands the financial struggles people deal with and would like to find a way to offset this proposed increase.

Lyle Scruggs, Thomas Drive, appreciates that declining student enrollment leads to higher fixed costs but is concerned that the extra squeeze on the budget in part determines who get diagnosed under the Special Needs program.

The motion failed in a voice vote.

Ric Hossack, Middle Turnpike, commended the Council for approving a budget with no tax increase. Mr. Hossack moved to reduce the Community Development Program Capital Budget by \$4,000,000.

The motion was seconded.

Mr. Hossack commented that the sewer project has not been approved by the voters and should be eliminated until voters have done so.

Antonia Moran, Mansfield City Road resident and Town Council member, stated that the funds are a place holder and all future bonding expenditures are required to be brought to referendum.

Peter Millman, Dog Lane, believes the water and sewer project is an investment in the Town and will allow for future development. Mr. Millman stated that this project will be beneficial to the Town.

The motion to amend failed on a voice vote.

Douglas Kaufman, Birch Road, moved to end debate.

Seconded, the motion passed on a voice vote, with a two thirds majority.

Mr. Clouette called for a vote on the appropriations as amended.

The vote was by paper ballot.

Those in favor were 155 and those opposed were 33. The budget passed.

The meeting adjourned 9:25 p.m.

Mary Stanton, Town Clerk

